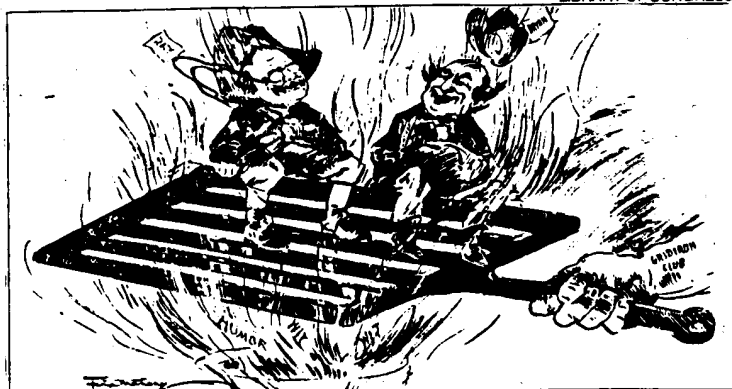


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Theodore Roosevelt and William Jennings Bryan were singing

Gridiron's century of sizzling

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Washington

GROVER Cleveland didn't attend it. But Benjamin Harrison did. And so has every United States president since then, including Ronald Reagan.

"It" is the annual Gridiron Dinner, one of the most exclusive and certainly the most nonsensical annual social event in the nation's capital. And with the Gridiron Club celebrating its 100th anniversary, the white-tie dinner Saturday night was a special occasion of nostalgia and madcap mirth. Imagine Geraldine Ferraro singing to the melody of "La Donna E Mobile":

EXCERPTED

William Casey, director of central intelligence, also took a hazing in a spirited rendition of "America, West Side Story":

Hoo-ray for Cen-tral A-me-ri-ca!
C-I-A's Cen-tral A-me-ri-ca!
We'll pay for Cen-tral A-me-ri-ca!
O-k in Cen-tral A-me-ri-ca!
Cas-tro's a no in Ma-na-gua.
Min-ing is go in Ma-na-gua.
I know a plan that can cure us:
We will take o-ver Hon-du-ras.

Nor did the Democrats go unscathed. An impersonator of New York Gov. Mario Cuomo sang an impassioned version of "Arrivederci, Roma":

Bon giorn-no, Ma-rio Cuo-mo.
Hell-o, hell-o, to you.
I was such a su-per-great key-no-ter,
Tak-ing care of ev-ry eth-nic quo-ta,
Bet that I could cary-ry Min-ne-so-ta

On and on went the evening of nonsense, with Gridiron president John W. Krole of the Milwaukee Journal serving as master of ceremonies and Marine Col. John R. Bourgeois crisply directing the musical production. This year's musical stars wore particularly outlandish and colorful costumes, all planned with a view to a television taping of the show for a one-hour special "Politicians on the Grid-dle" to be aired on PBS May 6.

Not to be forgotten amid all the hilarity and gentle fun — the skits are supposed to "sing but never burn" — was the early highlight of the Gridiron dinner: a performance by the US Marine Corps Band. When the men and women of the band, dressed smartly in their reds and blues, struck out with "Stars and Stripes for Ever" and other favorite marches, they electrified their listeners and set the tone for an evening of bipartisan fun.

Where, one wonders, but in America?